COVER

A TROUBLED REBEL CHOOSES A SILENT DEATH

The clown prince of the left, Abbie Hoffman never went quietly until finally he wearied of struggling to be heard

AP

His 1968 arrest in Washington for wearing the flag, left, didn't stop Hoffman from showing his colors in New York.

In the sunny, plant-filled apartment where Abbie Hoffman ended his life with a massive overdose of phenobarbital, the artifacts on the wall bespoke decades of rebellion: a poster of the Grateful Dead, another of a raised fist with the word STRIKE!, a bumper sticker reading VOTE REPUBLICAN. IT'S EASIER THAN THINKING, a photo of a young Hoffman wearing a Chicago policeman's shirt.

Summoned to this corner of pastoral Bucks County, Pa., six years ago by an environmental group that wanted his help battling the diversion of the Delaware River water to cool a nuclear reactor, Hoffman told an interviewer in 1987 that he was happy to "live and die here fighting the Philadelphia Electric Company—it's just like the '60s for me."

But it was not just like the '60s. In that theatrical era, young Abbie Hoffman held center stage. A self-styled "Groucho Marxist" and co-founder of the Youth International Party (supporters were dubbed yippies), which existed mostly in his imagination, he was the antiwar movement's mad genius of media events. He disrupted business on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange by tossing dollar bills from the balcony. He rallied 50,000 anti–Vietnam War demonstrators to levitate the Pentagon. He nominated a pig—Pigasus—for President when thousands of protesters converged on Chicago to demonstrate at the 1968 Democratic Convention. The violence in the streets there led to the most famous political trial of the decade, as Hoffman and his Chicago Eight co-defendants were charged in 1969 with conspiracy to incite riot.

They ultimately beat the charges but not before turning Judge Julius Hoffman's courtroom into a countercultural circus: Abbie somersaulted into court one day and wore judicial robes another. "Where do you reside?" his lawyer asked him on the witness stand. "I live in Woodstock Nation," he replied. "It is a nation of alienated young people. We carry it around with us as a state of mind. . . . It is a nation dedicated to . . . the idea that people should have better means of exchange than property or money."

Just what that "better means" should be was never clearly spelled out, but it didn't matter then. "F--- the System!" was program enough so long as it left room for lots of sex and drugs and rock and roll. "He used to say, 'All I care about is who's bringing the ice cream to the demonstration,' " recalls fellow yippie Jer-

Photograph by Charles Gatewood/Magnum

ALAN D. LEVENSON/HBO

On the set of a 1987 TV movie about their trial, Hoffman joined co-defendants and Bobby Seale, right.

©DUANE HALL/CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Chicago Seven defendants, from left: Hoffman, John Froines, Lee Weiner, Dellinger, Rennie Davis, Rubin (seated), Tom Hayden. Bobby Seale was also charged, but tried separately.

ry Rubin, 50. "Essentially, he wanted to have fun."

Now, those alienated young people are no longer young, and Woodstock Nation is a memory. But "Abbie wasn't interested in nostalgia," says Al Giordano, 29, a journalist who knew him well. "He was interested in battling the power structure. He had learned that nostalgia is just another form of depression."

The last thing Hoffman needed was more forms of depression. Diagnosed by the early '80s as manic-depressive, he'd seen far more valleys than peaks in recent years. Rubin recalls that on a 1983 trip to Mexico, "He spoke like a man whose life was over. Abbie went to the colleges, and he'd say, 'Are you kids just thinking about yourselves? Don't you care about Nicaragua? The homeless?' When I first saw Abbie's face, in the '60s, it was a face without pain. But you looked at his face now, it was nothing but suffering."

"He probably died of a broken heart," opines his friend Paul Kantner, formerly of the rock group Jefferson Airplane. "Abbie loved the potential of this country, and he worked furiously to realize that potential. That's where his frustration was. He felt he wasn't getting enough attention—because he was the consummate showman."

Yet Hoffman had been an activist long before the whole world was watching. Growing up as a Jew in Worcester, Mass., he personally encountered discrimination. Vowing to fight bigotry on all fronts, he joined the first wave of Northern civil rights workers to go into the South. Employed as a pharmaceutical salesman at the time, he used the company car to ferry volunteers into Mississippi and Georgia. The beatings he suffered there gave Hoffman "a certain wildness in the eyes he didn't have before," says an old Worcester friend.

But he always remained a uniquely American radical. He loved to play cards, shoot pool, watch sports on TV. A die-hard Red Sox fan, he insisted every spring that this would be the year

hey'd finally win the World Series.

"I have never seen myself as anything more than a good community organizer," Hoffman wrote in his 1980 autobiography, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*. "It was just the Vietnam War that made the community bigger, that's all."

But in the '60s he came to depend upon that big community, and in recent years it had gotten much, much smaller. Where once his every word was deemed significant—his books sold 3 million copies—now Hoffman spoke to small and sometimes unenthusiastic audiences. From 1984 to 1986, he and Rubin—who renounced radicalism to become a Wall Street marketing director and now a Manhattan nightclub promoter—appeared on 50 campuses a year, splitting $5,000 a pop to put on their yippie vs. yuppie "debate." It was the rhetorical equivalent of pro wrestling, and Hoffman knew it. He tried stand-up comedy at a New York club last August, but his performance was essentially a warmed-over lecture, and it flopped. "It was almost pitiful," says a friend.

"He was trying so hard to be contemporary," says Jonathan Silvers, 27, who co-wrote the last of Hoffman's nine books, *Steal This Urine Test* (a critical success and commercial failure), "fighting drug testing and fighting to drop that label of the '60s." Yet no other label seemed to apply. Even as Hoffman vigorously pressed his causes—he was arrested with Amy Carter protesting CIA recruitment at the University of Massachusetts in 1986—it was seen as a pale reenactment of that halcyon decade.

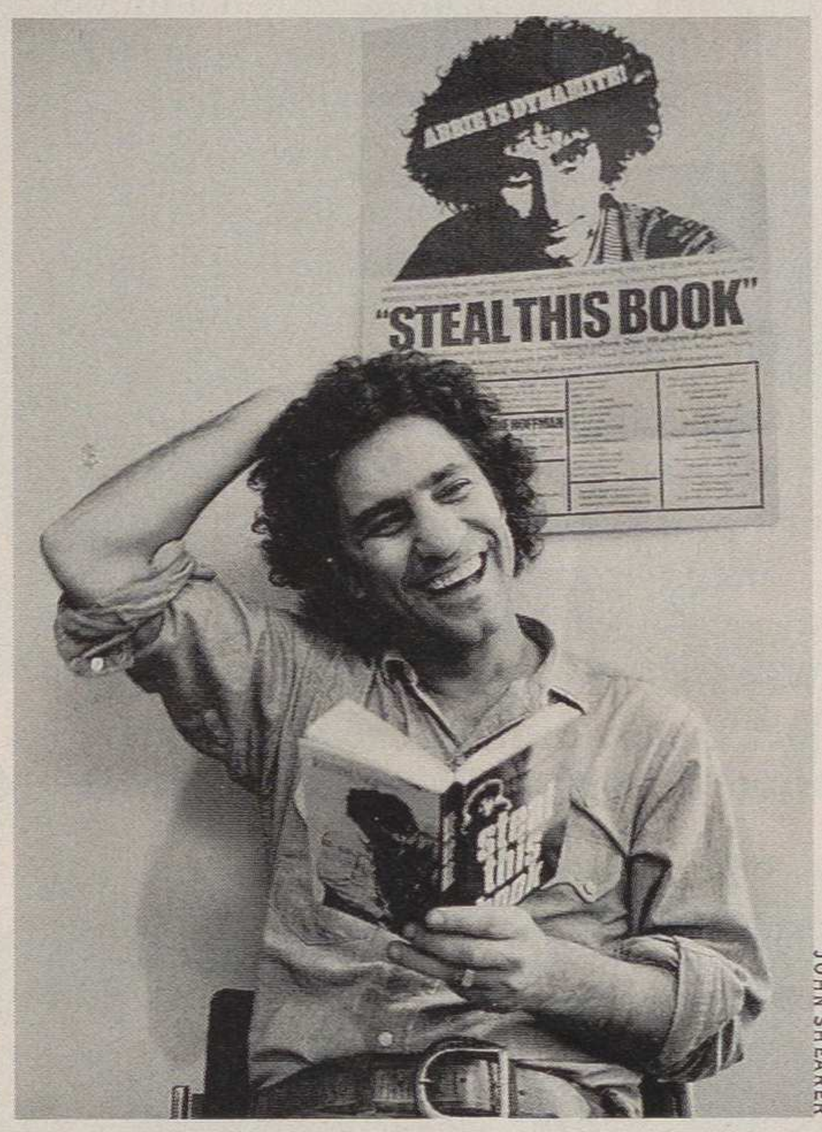
"He didn't have major goals worked out for the future. He was going day by day," says Silvers. "He was busy, but he wanted more order in his life." Frantic activity became a substitute for clear purpose. "Every time I called him on the phone I got the feeling he had thousands of things going on," says an acquaintance, "It was like dealing with a short-order cook."

The acute pains of Hoffman's withdrawal from the limelight began in 1974, when, facing 15 years to life for arranging the sale of three pounds of cocaine to undercover cops, he skipped bail and went underground. His then-wife, Anita, and their 2-year-old boy, america, stayed behind. Suddenly the media darling "had to learn to be alone, not to be famous, not to be the center of attention," recalls Anita. "His letters were so desolate." He took crazy risks to appear in public and see his family—and sometimes he snapped. Once in a Las Vegas hotel room, recalls old friend and *Realist* publisher Paul Krassner, "He freaked out and screamed, 'I'm Abbie Hoffman! I'm Abbie Hoffman!' "

Family and friends learned to expect these "periodic breakdowns" while he was a fugitive, says Andrew Hoffman, his son by his first marriage. At 16, Andrew was suddenly dispatched to Canada because his father was in no shape to be left alone. "In typical Abbie fashion, everything came to a halt, and I got on a plane," says Andrew, now 28. "When I

©RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN-TELEPHOTO

Hoffman and wife Anita posed in Nixon and pig masks—and nothing else—for the cover of her 1970 book, *Trashing*.



JOHN SHEARER

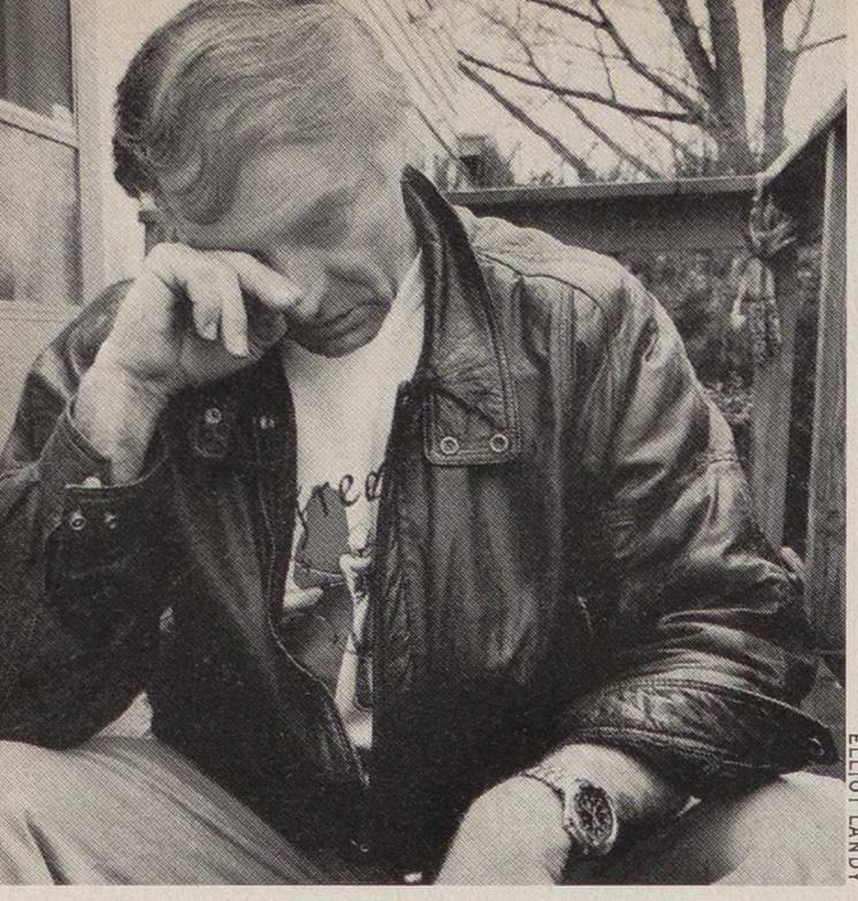
Thirty publishers rejected *Steal This Book*, so Hoffman published it himself, selling over 260,000 copies in 1971.

FRED W. MCDARRAH

"We were so much in love," says Anita, whose 1967 wedding to Abbie in New York's Central Park attracted 3,500.

DAVE HARVEY/BLACK STAR

"Law exists to serve order. Our goal is disorder," said Hoffman, here speaking at the University of Kansas in 1970.



ELLIOT LANDY

"There's nowhere in life that Abbie walked away from a fight," says brother Jack, who questioned the suicide ruling.

ELLIOT LANDY

Andrew, with Ilya, above, says it was hard to rebel against their father. "Everything I tried—he agreed with me."

CURT GUNTHER

Hoffman "influenced my life as any parent would—as a role model," says america, 17, with Anita in L.A.

got to the hotel, he was very hyper and wanted to go out. We went to this bar and these two French-speaking gentlemen were buying me expensive drinks. I said, 'Dad, what's going on?' 'Oh,' he said, 'I told them you were the most famous rock star in Mexico.' So even when he was underground, he would figure out some way to draw attention and get people excited."

But Hoffman also did solid political work during his six years in hiding. Settling in Fineview, N.Y., on the St. Lawrence River, in 1976, he took the name Barry Freed and became the respected leader of the Save the River movement, which successfully opposed a dredging project. He'd landed in Fineview because it was the family home of his "running mate," former model Johanna Lawrenson, whom he'd met while lying low in Mexico. (A year after he'd gone underground, Hoffman wrote Anita, "I'm getting married. God! That's gotta' be the strangest thing a guy could tell his wife." But in fact, though Anita and Abbie divorced in 1980, Hoffman and Johanna never wed in their 14 years together.)

His environmental work was cited by some of the 400 luminaries—including William F. Buckley Jr., Norman Mailer, Burt Lancaster and Gene Kelly—who wrote the authorities on his behalf when Hoffman surfaced in 1980 to face the cocaine charges. He plea bargained and served only 11 months.

In some ways, friends say, Hoffman mellowed during his years underground. "When he came back, he seemed more solid," says fellow activist Dave Dellinger. For one thing, he had lost his enthusiasm for psychedelic drugs. "I have gone on to other things," he wrote in *Urine Test.* In other ways, he hadn't changed at all—in his relationships with women for example.

He married his first wife, Sheila, in 1960, when they were just out of college. Sheila, now 51 and a therapist in the Boston area, left him in 1966—even though it meant being on welfare with their two small children, Andrew and Ilya. Though he was often warm and loving, she could not live in a world that revolved solely around Abbie. "I never knew anyone who wanted to be a husband more than Abbie," she says, "but he didn't know how to do it." She never remarried.

Hoffman's second wife, Anita Kushner, whom he married in 1967 during the headiest days of the movement, says, "I spent my time bailing him out of jail. I'm not saying that was the greatest thrill. But I saw my role as a real helpmate, so he was free to act out his own thing." Eventually though, with the coming of the women's liberation movement, says Anita, "I didn't feel I knew who I was."

In recent years Johanna Lawrenson grappled with the same imbalance. While she and Abbie lived underground, she recalls, "I did all the typing, all the driving, all the packing, all the arranging." In 1987 she declined to move with him to Pennsylvania and instead took a part-time job at a chess shop in New York City. Hoffman didn't like that. "But it was too much overload working for Abbie," she says. "There was no limit to the amount of work that he could think up for people to do." Even the children were drawn into the vortex of Hoffman's hyperactivity—Ilya once called her father from college to say, "I won't be your f------ secretary anymore!" Yet all of his families loved him dearly, and in his own fun house–mirror way, Hoffman was a proud husband and father. Ilya remembers the time, as a youngster, when she called him and said, "Dad, I got arrested!" And he said, "Great! What for?" "I told him I'd gone

"He made me laugh. That's the thing I loved about him the most," says Lawrenson, with Hoffman in Central Park in 1980.

camping in a graveyard. 'Well, that's a good start,' he said. And I thought, 'Dad, you're not supposed to say that to me!' "

"He was so cute and we loved to cuddle so much," says Johanna, starting to cry in her tiny Manhattan apartment as she gazes at his picture. "That was our thing. Whenever anything was wrong, we'd get into bed and cuddle and hug."

Johanna had been hoping that Abbie would slow down. "I'd say, 'You're carrying this weight. Relax a little bit. You can't go running around with the kids all the time.' Everybody would call him and want him to come and speak here, help organize there, and he looked tired from that."

Part of the problem was money. Hoffman had never had much and tended to give away what he had. But a bad car accident last June, from which he never fully recovered, may have called up the old fears from his fugitive days of "growing old . . . alone and broke." In that dark mood, he wrote in his autobiography, "I craved death but lacked the energy or initiative to do the deed. Instead I lay in bed and waited."

On April 12 Hoffman's landlord, Michael Waldron, got a call from Johanna, who said she'd been unable to reach Abbie by phone. Waldron discovered him, fully clothed, in bed. "He was lying on his side, his head on his hands. The blanket on top of him wasn't even disturbed. He looked so peaceful lying there." The Bucks County coroner, finding that Abbie had ingested a lethal mix of alcohol and the equivalent of 150 phenobarbital pills, ruled the death a suicide. But Abbie's younger brother, Jack, at first found that hard to accept. Hoffman had been taking lithium and other prescribed drugs for his manic-depressive condition, and, says Jack, 49, "He really felt he could beat this. I can't believe he would just give up." Besides, their mother had recently been diagnosed with recurring cancer, and "Abbie wouldn't have left me alone with this problem," says Jack. "He was always there when I needed him."

Looking back, though, it seems that in recent months Hoffman had been settling his accounts. "In the last two months he was definitely depressed," Anita says. "I know you've done the best you can raising america," he wrote in one of his last letters to her. "I was moved and touched," says Anita. "He never said I did a good job before."

Ilya, now a youth services caseworker in the Boston area, where her brother Andrew is an artist and carpenter, says, "In a lot of our last conversations, he talked about us carrying on. He was saying, 'I'm tired.' And he wanted us—not just the two of us, but all young people—to carry on. I don't know if we would choose exactly the same way he did, but it's in our blood to stand up for what we believe in."

> **"In a lot of our last conversations, he talked about us carrying on," says Ilya. "He was saying, 'I'm tired.' "**

Says Jerry Rubin: "People said that he only acted and talked when the press was there. But after he came out from the underground, there was no press. He was talking to kids. He was teaching. He was a great teacher. He would have been a fantastic old person."

Maybe, but now Abbie Hoffman lives in Woodstock Nation, where he is forever young.

—James S. Kunen, Andrea Fine in Bucks County, Ken Gross and Victoria Balfour in New York, Jacqueline Savaiano in L.A. and Gayle Verner in Worcester

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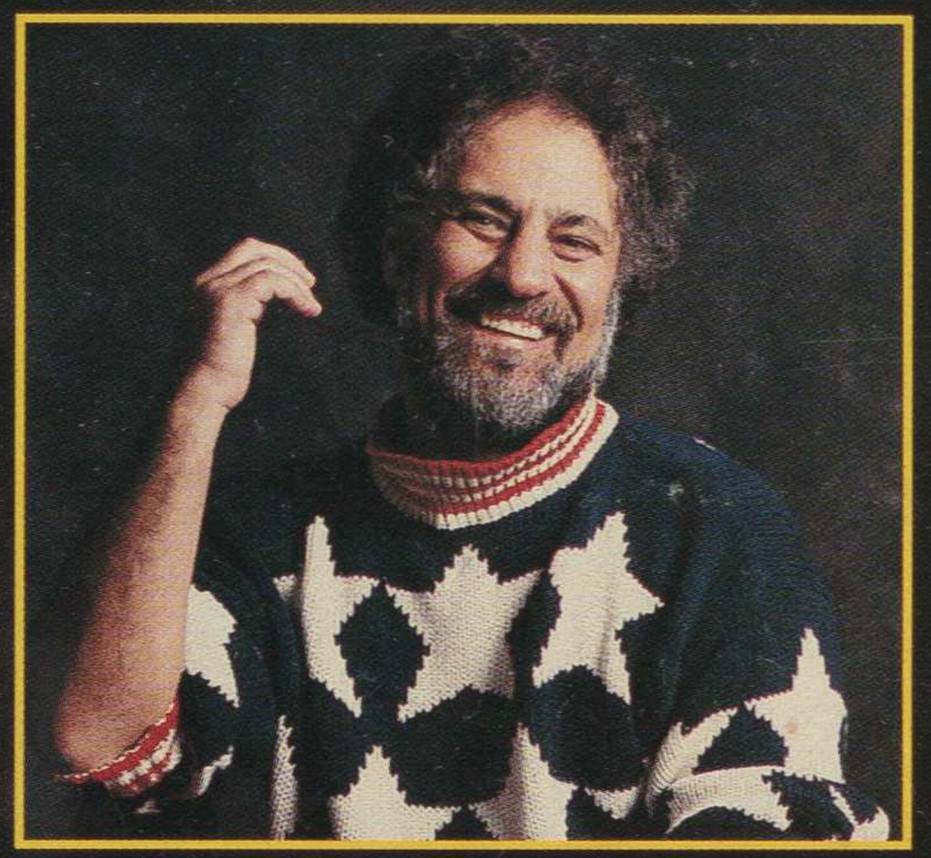
People weekly

ABBIE HOFFMAN 1936-1989

DEATH OF A RADICAL



He was the madcap firebrand of '60s protest, but when times changed, he didn't. As the spotlight dimmed, he battled depression, brooded about the future and finally took his own life at 52. Here, from family and friends, is the inside story of his final years

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People weekly

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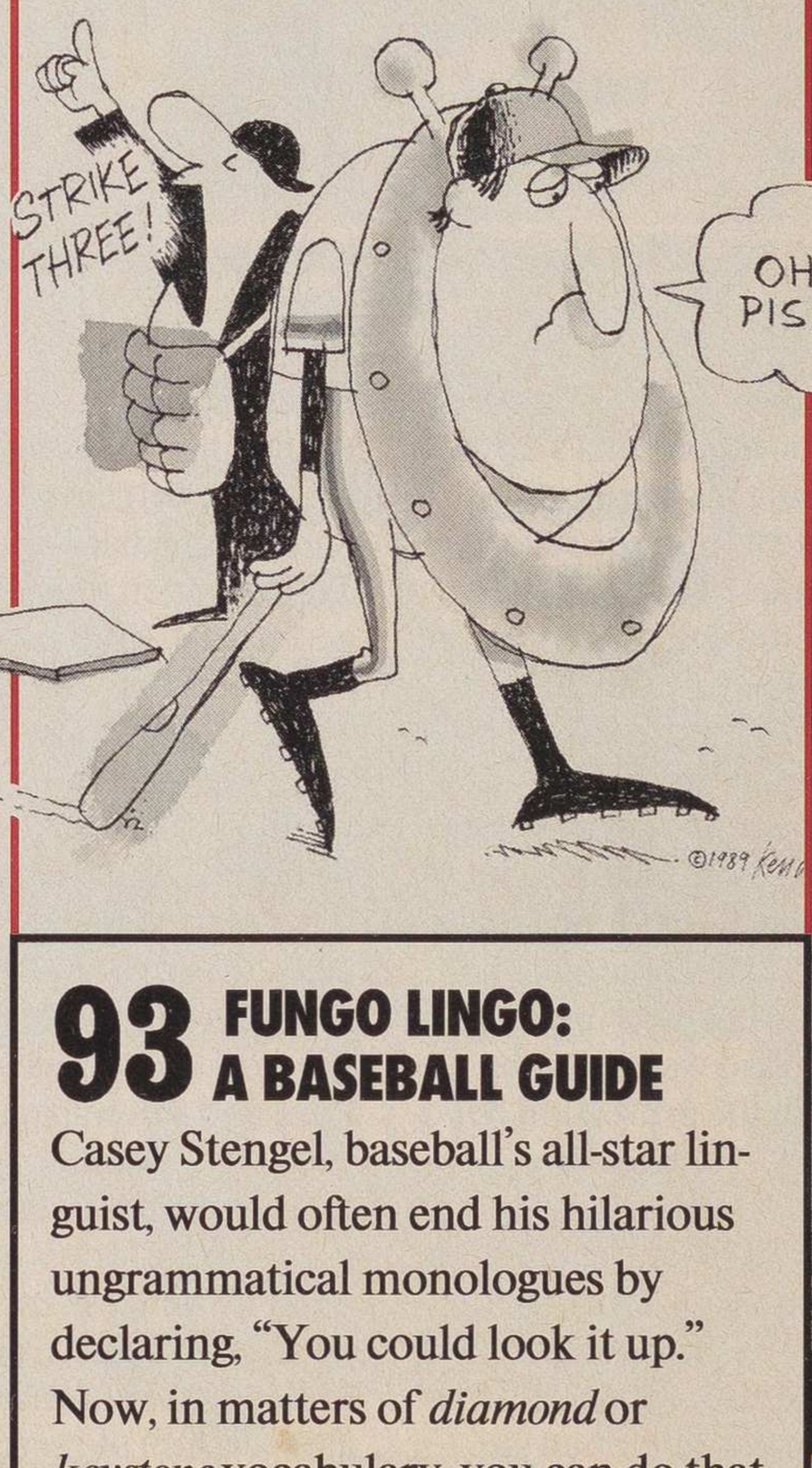

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NEAL PRESTON/OUTLIN

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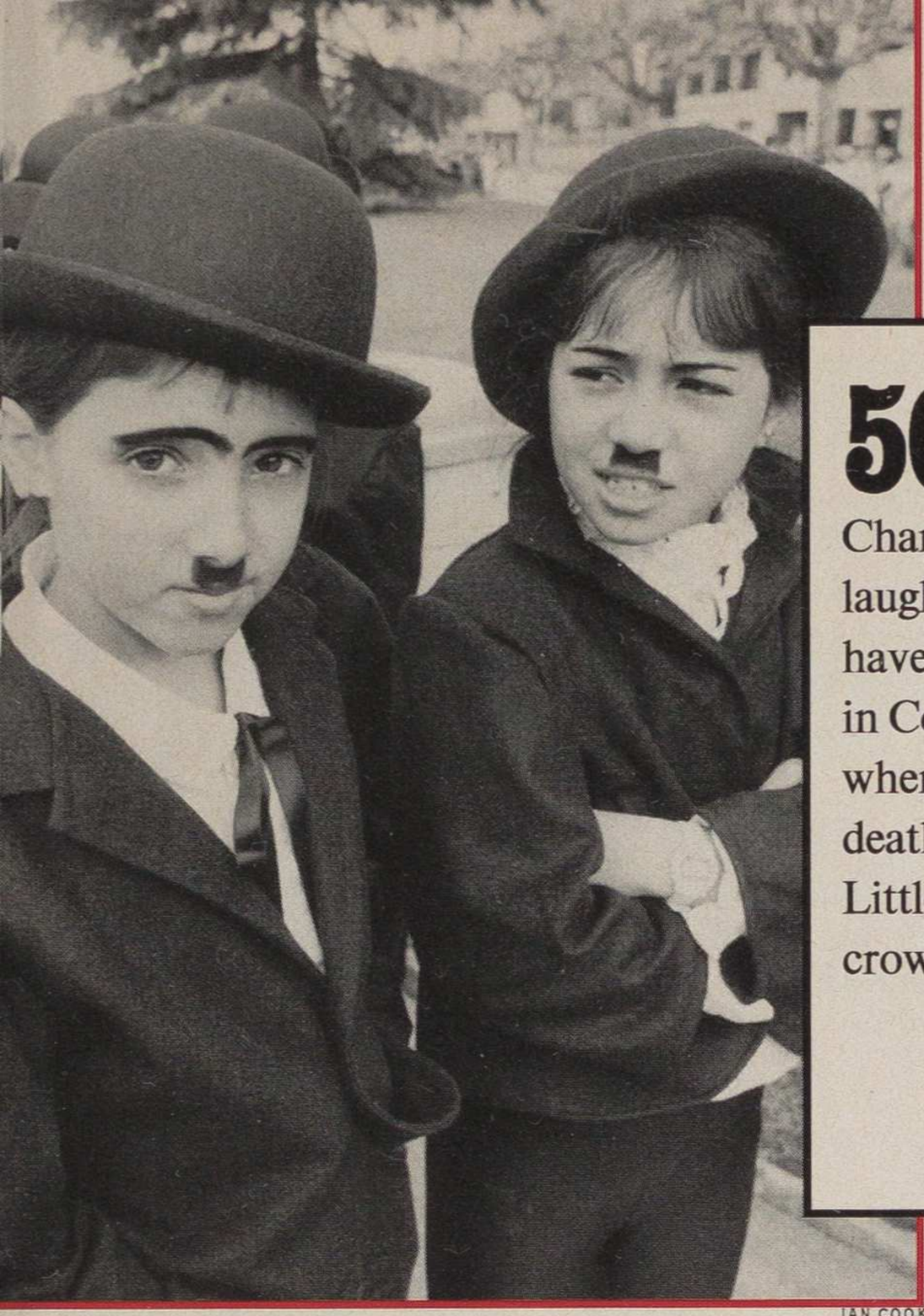

IAN COOK

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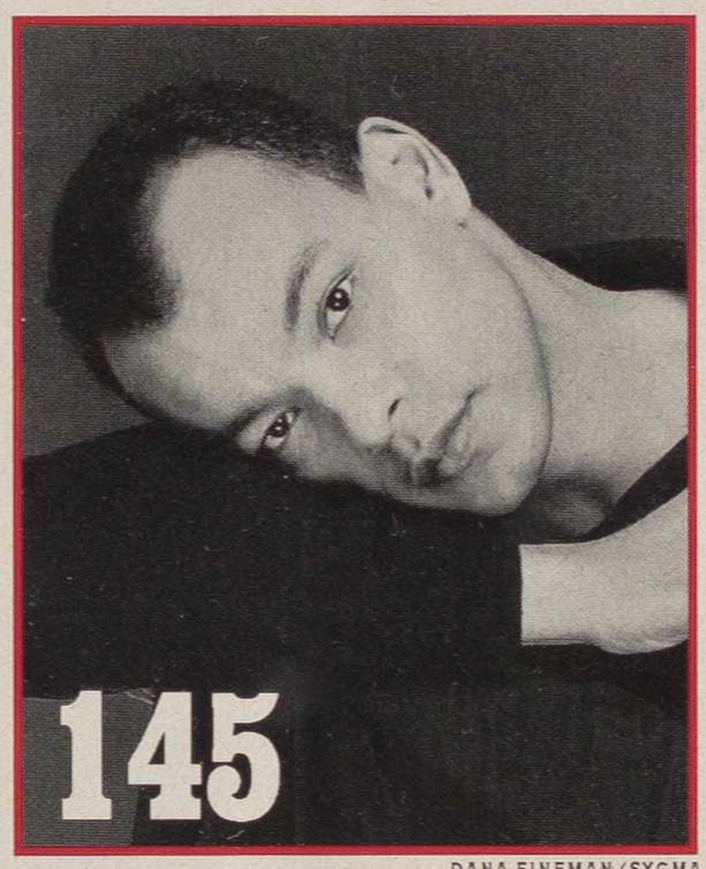

DANA FINEMAN/SYGMA

59 AMI DOLENZ: A MONKEE'S CHILD

Call it a case of Monkee see, Monkee do. Call it a case of a chimp off the old block. And, okay, maybe it's nothing to go absolutely ape over, but Ami Dolenz, daughter of Micky Dolenz, drummer in the prefabricated '60s rock group the Monkees, is about to join the Hollywood jungle. Ami, who for the last two years has played Melissa McKee on ABC's *General Hospital* . . .

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